

# Maybrat language

**Maybrat** is a Papuan language spoken in the central parts of the Bird's Head Peninsula in the Indonesian province of West Papua.

Maybrat is also known as **Ayamaru**, after the name of its principal dialect, while the divergent **Karon Dori** dialect has sometimes been counted as a separate language. Maybrat is not demonstrably related to any other language, and so is considered a language isolate. Nevertheless, in its grammatical structure it has a number of features that are shared with the neighbouring languages.

Maybrat is characterised by a relatively small consonant inventory and an avoidance of most types of consonant clusters. There are two genders: masculine and unmarked. Morphology is simple. Verbs and inalienably possessed nouns alike take person prefixes. There is an elaborate system of demonstratives (words like "this" or "that"), with encoding for distance from speaker, specificity and syntactic function. In the clause, there is a fairly rigid subject–verb–object word order, and within noun phrases modifiers follow the head noun. Verb sequences, including serial verbs are very common, and verbs are used for a number of functions which in languages like English are served by adjectives or prepositions.

Maybrat	
Region	Maybrat Regency, West Papua
Ethnicity	Maybrat
Native speakers	(25,000 cited 1987) <sup>[1]</sup>
Language family	Language isolate
Dialects	Mayhapeh Maymaru Mayasmaun Maymare Mayte Karon Dori
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	Either: ayz – Mai Brat kgw – Karon Dori
Glottolog	maib1239 ( <a href="http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/maib1239">http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/maib1239</a> ) <sup>[2]</sup>
	
Coordinates: 1.37°S 132.59°E	

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# Background

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With around 25,000 speakers (as of 1987),<sup>[1]</sup> Maybrat is among the most populous languages of Indonesian Papua.<sup>[3]</sup> Its speakers are the Maybrat people, whose main occupations have been hunting, fishing and swidden agriculture.<sup>[4]</sup> They have traditionally lived in scattered homesteads, with the organisation into villages (kampongs) initiated by the efforts of the Dutch administration between the 1930s and the 1950s.<sup>[5]</sup> This has had an effect on the language. For example, the establishment of the settlement of Ayawasi in 1953 brought together scattered local groups where each family had spoken a slightly different "family dialect", resulting in a "melting pot" where these small dialectal differences are levelled in the speech of the younger generations.<sup>[6]</sup>

Maybrat is spoken in a large area in the central parts of the Bird's Head Peninsula and a large portion of its speakers are concentrated around the Ayamara Lakes, although many are also found in urban areas of Indonesian Papua.<sup>[7]</sup> Maybrat is surrounded by a number of languages. To the north are two other isolates: Abun and Mpur; to the east are Meyah and Moskona, both members of the East Bird's Head language family; the South Bird's Head languages Arandai, Kaburi, Kais and Konda are spoken to the south; the neighbouring languages to the west are Tehit and Moraid, both of the West Bird's Head family.<sup>[8]</sup>

The language of wider communication in this area since the arrival of the Dutch was Malay, while more recently this role has been taken up by the related Indonesian.<sup>[9]</sup> Most Maybrat of Ayawasi, for example, are fully bilingual in Indonesian, with the use of Indonesian loanwords and code-switching between the two languages fairly common.<sup>[10]</sup>

The word "Maybrat" is a compound of *mai* 'sound, language',<sup>[11]</sup> and according to one explanation, its meaning is "the language Brat", where "Brat" is the name of a hill near the village of Semetu in the Ayamaru region.<sup>[12]</sup>

# Classification and dialects

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Maybrat is considered a language isolate, as a genetic relationship to any other language has not been established. There have been attempts to subsume it under putative families like the "Toror languages" (also including Abun and the West Bird's Head languages), or the broader West Papuan phylum. Even if not demonstrably related to any other language and sharing only a small percentage of its vocabulary with its neighbours, Maybrat nevertheless has a great deal in its grammatical structure that resembles other languages of the Bird's Head.<sup>[13]</sup>

There have been various classifications and listings of the dialects of Maybrat<sup>[a]</sup> The local tradition of the speakers recognises the following six dialects (the villages where each is spoken are given in brackets):<sup>[14]</sup>

- Mayhapeh (Ayawasi, Kokas, Mosun, Konya, Kumurkek)
- Mayasmaun (Ayata, Kamat, Aisa)
- Karon (Senopi, Fef)
- Maymare (Suswa, Sire)

- Maymaru (Ayamaru)
- Mayte (Aytinyo, Fuoh)

The most distinct dialect, at least in comparison to Mayhapeh, is Karon, which in some previous surveys has been listed as a separate language. The differences between Maymaru and Mayhapeh on the other hand are very small, but the two are nevertheless regarded by their speakers as distinct dialects. This is largely because the Maymaru speak significantly faster, so much so that the Mayhapeh often have difficulties understanding them.<sup>[15]</sup> The dialect whose phonology and grammar are described in the following sections is Mayhapeh, as analysed by Dol in her 2007 grammar. The two papers by Brown (1990, 1991) are on the noun phrases and the phonology and they are based on the Maymaru dialect as spoken in the village of Kambuaya.

## Phonology

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Maybrat has five vowel phonemes and a small consonant inventory consisting of between nine and eleven consonant phonemes, depending on the analysis. Closed syllables are not uncommon, but most types of consonant clusters are broken up with the insertion of a schwa vowel. The placement of stress is not predictable.

### Vowels

The following table presents the five Maybrat vowels along with their allophones as documented in the Mayhapeh dialect:<sup>[16]</sup>

Vowels in the Mayhapeh dialect

Phoneme	Allophones	Notes
a	<u>a</u>	obligatory before [ʔ], in free variation with [ɑ] otherwise
	<u>ɑ</u>	obligatory before /x/, in free variation with [a] otherwise
e	<u>e</u>	in open syllables
	<u>ɛ</u>	in closed syllables
i	<u>i</u>	everywhere
	<u>ɪ</u>	optionally before /k/
	<u>j</u>	optionally at the end of the word after a vowel
o	<u>o</u>	in open syllables; also optionally before /m/ in one-syllable words
	<u>ɔ</u>	in closed syllables, or when preceded by /i/ or /u/
	<u>ɒ</u>	optionally when preceded by /u/ and followed by either /k/ or /x/
	<u>ʌ</u>	optionally when preceded by /u/ and followed by /t/
u	<u>u</u>	everywhere
	<u>y</u>	optionally before /o/: /kuo/ → [ ' kuwo] ~ [ ' kywo]
	<u>w</u>	optionally at the end of the word after a vowel

A non-phonemic schwa vowel /ə/ is used, mostly to break up consonant clusters (see below). A schwa is also optionally inserted before the initial consonant in a small number of short words: [ti] ~ [ə 'ti] 'night'.<sup>[17]</sup> Vowels are phonetically lengthened in stressed one-syllable words.<sup>[18]</sup> A vowel at the start of a word is optionally preceded, and a vowel at the end of a word is optionally followed, by a non-phonemic glottal stop [ʔ], typically when the word is uttered in isolation: [ɔm] ~ [ʔom] 'rain', [ 'mata] ~ [ 'mataʔ] 'they drink'.<sup>[19]</sup>

Not all of these allophones have been documented in the Maymaru dialect. However, it does have the following allophone rules not described for the Mayhapeh dialect: word-final /o/ is pronounced as [ɔ̣] after /i/, while unstressed word-final /a/ is realised as [ə̣].<sup>[20]</sup>

## Consonants

Consonants  
in the Mayhapeh dialect

	<u>Labial</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>
<u>Plosive</u>	p	t		k
<u>Nasal</u>	m	n		
<u>Fricative</u>	f	s		x
<u>Trill</u>		r		
<u>Approximant</u>	w		j	

In the Mayhapeh dialect, the bilabial stop /p/ does not occur at the end of the word. It has two allophones – voiceless [p] and voiced [b] – which are in free variation in all positions: /tapam/ 'land' → [ 'tapam] ~ [ 'tabam]; the voiceless allophone is more common, even between vowels. The velar stop /k/ is voiceless, but it has an optional voiced allophone [g] between vowels, and an optional unreleased allophone [k̚] at the end of the word. The alveolar stop /t/ is always voiceless, and in word-final position [t] is in free variation with the aspirated [tʰ] and the unreleased [t̚]: /poiit/ 'food' → [ 'pɔi:t] ~ [ 'pɔi:tʰ] [ 'pɔi:t̚]. The labial fricative /f/ has two allophones in free variation: the voiceless labiodental fricative [f] and the voiceless bilabial fricative [ɸ]. The velar fricative /x/, which in the practical orthography is written as *h*, can be either voiceless [x] or voiced [ɣ]: /xren/ 'they sit' → [xə 'rɛn] ~ [ɣə 'rɛn]. The rhotic consonant is always an alveolar trill [r] at the start of the word, while in other positions it is in free variation with the alveolar tap [ɾ].<sup>[21]</sup>

Voiced allophones are generally more common in the other dialects.<sup>[22]</sup> For example, in the Maymaru dialect, spoken in the area of Ayamaru, the bilabial stop is always voiced [b], while the alveolar stop /t/ becomes voiced [d] after /n/. The velar stop /k/ becomes voiced /g/ either before /i/ or after /n/.<sup>[23]</sup>

The semivowels /j/ and /w/ are treated as distinct consonantal phonemes in Dol's study of the Mayhapeh dialect of Ayawasi, but Brown's analysis of the Maymaru dialect they are instead analysed as allophones of the vowels /i/ and /u/ respectively.<sup>[24]</sup> In the remainder of this article, the semivowel /j/ is represented with ⟨y⟩, following the practical orthography.

## Consonant clusters

At the phonemic level, consonant clusters do occur, either at the start or in the middle of the word, but they are invariably broken up by the insertion of the epenthetic vowel schwa [ə]. Thus, /tre/ 'bracelet' is pronounced [tə 're], /twok/ → [tə 'wɔk] 'they enter', /mti/ → [mə 'ti] 'evening'.<sup>[b]</sup> This also happens when the consonant cluster is in the middle of the word between vowels (/mfokfok/ → [mə ,fɔkə 'fɔk] 'they roll'), except if the first consonant of the cluster is a nasal: /nimpon/ → [ 'nimpɔn] 'watermelon'.<sup>[25]</sup> The

epenthetic schwa can assimilate in quality to the following vowel: /mtie/ → [mɪ 'tije].<sup>[26]</sup> Those Maybrat speakers who are also fluent in Indonesian, can and do pronounce clusters of a consonant + r (which are also found in Indonesian), for example /pron/ 'bamboo' → [prɔn] (in contrast to [pə 'rɔn], as pronounced by people who speak only Maybrat).<sup>[27]</sup>

## Stress

The placement of stress is not predictable, although it most often falls on the first syllable (schwa vowels getting skipped: /tfo/ → [tə 'fo]).<sup>[28]</sup> Stress is phonemic at least in the Maymaru dialect. In his description of this dialect, Brown adduces several minimal pairs of words that differ solely in the placement of stress: / 'ana/ 'they' (with stress falling on the first syllable) vs. /a 'na/ 'fence' (stress falling on the second syllable), //mo 'o/ 'she itches' vs. / 'moo/ 'she takes'.<sup>[29]</sup> In her study of the Mayhapeh dialect of Ayawasi, Dol notes that such pairs, though perceived by the native speakers as distinct, are acoustically indistinguishable, thus "they" and "fence" are both / 'ana/.<sup>[30]</sup> Her conclusion, which has received some criticism,<sup>[31]</sup> is that stress is only weakly phonemic.<sup>[32]</sup>

At the end of a sentence, many older speakers blow a puff of air through their nose, which appears to be a common phenomenon in the languages of the Bird's Head Peninsula.<sup>[33]</sup>

## Grammar

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### Personal pronouns and prefixes

Maybrat has a set of independent personal pronouns and the corresponding person prefixes that are used with verbs and some nouns:

Personal pronouns and prefixes  
(Mayhapeh dialect)<sup>[34]</sup>

Meaning	Independent pronoun	Prefix
<u>1s</u> 'I'	<i>tuo</i>	t-
<u>2s</u> 'You (singular)'	<i>nuo</i>	n-
<u>3M</u> 'He'	<i>ait</i>	y-
<u>3U</u> 'She/it'	<i>au</i>	m-
<u>1P</u> 'We'	<i>amu</i>	p-
<u>2P</u> 'You (plural)'	<i>anu</i>	n-
<u>3P</u> 'They'	<i>ana</i>	m-

The Maymaru dialect distinguishes between inclusive 'we' (meaning 'I + you') and exclusive 'we' ('I + he/she'). The inclusive form is *anu* (with corresponding person prefix *b-*) and the exclusive one is *amu* (with prefix *n-*). It also has somewhat different pronouns for the first and second person singular: *tyo*<sup>[c]</sup> 'I', and *nyo* 'you (singular)'.<sup>[35]</sup>

The person prefixes are obligatory for verbs and for inalienably possessed nouns (see below for the two possession constructions). When added to a verb, the prefix indexes the subject (*y-amo* 'He goes'), and when added to an inalienably possessed noun, it indexes the possessor (*y-ana* 'his head'). If the verb or noun

begins with the vowel *a*- then this vowel is dropped before prefixes for the first and second person plural.<sup>[d]</sup> The following table lists the prefixes of the Mayhapeh dialect along with an example paradigm:<sup>[36]</sup>

Meaning	Prefix	Example verb	Example noun
<u>1s</u> 'I'	<i>t-</i>	<i>t-tien</i> 'I sleep'	<i>t-ana</i> 'my head'
<u>1p</u> 'We'	<i>p-</i>	<i>p-tien</i> 'We sleep'	<i>p-na</i> 'our heads'
<u>2s</u> 'You' (singular)	<i>n-</i>	<i>n-tien</i> 'You sleep'	<i>n-ana</i> 'your head'
<u>2p</u> 'You' (plural)	<i>n-</i>	<i>n-tien</i> 'You sleep'	<i>n-na</i> 'your heads'
<u>3m</u> 'He'	<i>y-</i>	<i>y-tien</i> 'He sleeps'	<i>y-ana</i> 'his head'
<u>3u</u> 'She/it/they'	<i>m-</i>	<i>m-tien</i> 'She/it/they sleep'	<i>m-ana</i> 'her/their head/s'

There are words, nouns or verbs, that do not take person prefixes. This is largely determined phonologically: the prefix is not allowed if its addition would result in a word of three or more syllables. There are also five verbs that are exceptions: they do not allow person prefixes even though they are otherwise phonologically eligible.<sup>[37][e]</sup>

## Demonstratives

Maybrat has an elaborate system of demonstratives (these are words like "this", "that", or "there").<sup>[38]</sup> They are morphologically complex and consist of a prefix, a demonstrative base, and a suffix. The four demonstrative bases are differentiated based on distance from the speaker: *-f-* is for objects that are within physical reach of the speaker, *-t-* indicates objects a little further away but still near, *-n-* refers to objects that are far away, while *-au* does not specify a distance and so is used when the distance from the speaker is irrelevant. The demonstrative base is followed by a suffix specifying gender: *-o* is unmarked for gender, and *-i*, *-ait* or *-e* are for the masculine. Which of the three masculine suffixes to choose depends on the base: *-ait* is only used after *-t*, *-e* is used with *-n-*, while *-i* usually combines with *-f-*. Gender is relevant only with certain prefixes (*re-* and *me-/fi-* + *-t-*); otherwise, the unmarked suffix *-o* is used. Examples of the masculine and the unmarked forms:<sup>[39]</sup>

<i>rae</i> man 'this man very near'	<i>re-f-i</i> specific.location-very.near- <u>3m</u>
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<i>fai</i> woman 'this woman very near'	<i>re-f-o</i> specific.location-very.near- <u>u</u>
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<i>rae</i> man 'this man'	<i>re-t-ait</i> specific.location-near- <u>3m</u>
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<i>fai</i> woman 'this woman'	<i>re-t-o</i> specific.location-near- <u>u</u>
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<i>rae</i> man 'that man'	<i>re-n-e</i> specific.location-far- <u>3m</u>
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<i>fai</i>	<i>ro-n-o</i>
woman	specific.location-far-ᵐᵐ
'that woman'	

The demonstratives in the examples above have the prefix *re-*, which is used when the specific location of the object is known. If the exact location of the object is not known, then another prefix *we-* is employed:<sup>[40]</sup>

<i>pokom</i>	<b><i>we-f-o</i></b>
pen	general.location-very.near-ᵐᵐ
'this pen very near around here' (The pen is within reach but its exact position with respect to the speaker is not known.)	

<i>pokom</i>	<b><i>re-f-o</i></b>
pen	specific.location-very.near-ᵐᵐ
'this pen very near' (The location of the pen can be pinpointed.)	

Another prefix is *te-*, which refers to area, and so demonstratives with this prefix correspond to English words like "here" or "there", unlike ones with *re-* and *we-*, which can usually be translated as *this* or *that*:<sup>[41]</sup>

<i>amah</i>	<b><i>re-t-o</i></b>
house	specific.location-near-ᵐᵐ
'this house' (The demonstrative refers to the house itself.)	

<i>amah</i>	<b><i>te-t-o</i></b>
house	area.ATTR-near-ᵐᵐ
'the house here' (The demonstrative refers to the place where the house is situated.)	

All three prefixes discussed above – *re-*, *we-* and *te-* – mark their demonstratives for attributive use, that is, such demonstratives typically occur within a noun phrase and modify the head noun. Another set of prefixes is used for adverbial demonstratives, ones that can be used as adverbs to modify a clause. The following two examples contrast attributive and adverbial demonstratives:<sup>[42]</sup>

<i>amah</i>	<b><i>te-t-o</i></b>	(attributive)
house	area.ATTR-near-ᵐᵐ	
'the house near here'		

<i>y-tien</i>	<b><i>pe-t-o</i></b>	(adverbial)
3M-sleep	area.ADV-near-ᵐᵐ	
'He sleeps near here.'		

Another prefix is *me-*. It expresses a presentative: it introduces a new referent, which will normally be the topic of what follows next. Examples are:<sup>[43]</sup>

<i>m-ama</i>	<b><i>me-t-o</i></b>
3U-come	presentative-near-ᵐᵐ
'Here she comes.'	

<i>rae</i>	<i>y-ros</i>	<b><i>m-n-o</i></b>
man	3M-stand	presentative-far-ᵐᵐ
'There the man stands.'		

Two further prefixes are *fi-* 'similar.to', and *ti-* 'side':

<i>n-no</i>	<i>fi-f-o</i>	<i>n-no</i>
2-do	similar.to-very.near- <sub>U</sub>	2-do
<i>fi-n-o</i>	<i>mai</i>	
similar.to-far- <sub>U</sub>	PROHIB	

'Do it like this, don't do it like that. (Dol 2007, p. 104)

<i>m-piet</i>	<i>m-amo</i>	<i>ti-n-o</i>
3 <sub>U</sub> -throw	3 <sub>U</sub> -go	side-far- <sub>U</sub>
<i>m-piet</i>	<i>m-amo</i>	<i>ti-f-o</i>
3 <sub>U</sub> -throw	3 <sub>U</sub> -go	side-very.near- <sub>U</sub>

'She throws it to the side there and she throws it to the side here.' (Dol 2007, p. 103)

The specific demonstratives mentioned earlier, *refo*, *reto* and *rono*, can also be used without the *re-* prefix – as *fo*, *to* and *no* – without a significant change of meaning.<sup>[44]</sup> Two of these – *fo* and *to* – have an additional function. They can serve as anaphoric pronouns, referring to entities mentioned earlier in the text.<sup>[45][f]</sup>

Many of the demonstrative prefixes can also combine with the interrogative base *-yo/-ye*, resulting in the question words *fi-ye* 'how?', *ro-yo* 'which one?' and three more that translate into English as 'where?': *to-yo*, *wo-yo* and *mi-yo*. The difference between the three parallels the difference between the corresponding demonstratives. *Mi-yo* is used adverbially, while *wo-yo* and *to-yo* are normally used to question the locational object of verbs, with the distinguishing feature between these two being the degree of specificity:<sup>[46]</sup>

<i>ku</i>	<i>mi-yo</i>
child	presentative-INT

'Where is the child?'

<i>n-amo</i>	<i>to-yo</i>
2-go	area.ATTR-INT

'Where are you going?' (It is understood that there is a specific destination.)'

<i>m-amo</i>	<i>wo-yo</i>
3 <sub>U</sub> -go	general.location-INT

'Where does she go?' (The implication is that she does not have a clear goal.)'

Other question words are *awiya* 'who?', *r-awiya* 'whose?', *p-awiya* 'what?', *tiya* 'how much/many?' and *titiya* 'when?'.

## Numerals and counting

The younger people, noted Philomena Dol in the 1990s, normally count in Indonesian. Maybrat's traditional counting system described in the rest of this section is nowadays mostly confined to the older generation.<sup>[47]</sup> It employs base-5 numerals, in common with other non-Austronesian languages of the area.<sup>[48]</sup> Counting usually starts at the little finger of either hand,<sup>[g]</sup> and proceeds along the fingers of this hand using the dedicated number words: *sait* (for masculine) and *sau* (non-masculine) for 'one', *ewok* (or *eok*) meaning 'two', *tuf* 'three', *tiet* 'four', and *mat* 'five'. The numbers from six to nine are counted on the other hand, again starting from the little finger, using the complex numerals *krem sau* (literally 'one finger') for 'six', *krem ewok* (lit. 'two fingers') for 'seven', etc. 'Ten' is the word *statem*, which is derived from *t-atem* 'my hand'. Counting then proceeds with the little toe on one of the feet, where 'eleven' is *oo krem sau* (lit. 'foot toe one'), 'twelve' is *oo krem ewok* (lit. 'foot toe two'), etc. until 'fifteen' *oo sau muf* (lit. 'one full foot'). After



that, counting moves to the big toe of the other foot, with 'sixteen' being *oo sau krem sau* (lit. 'one foot, one toe'). Counting ends at the little toe, with the word for 'twenty' *rae sait yhai* literally meaning 'one man is gone'. Multiples of twenty then count the number of 'men gone', thus 'forty' is *rae ewok mhai*, lit. 'two men are gone'.<sup>[49]</sup>

## Nouns and noun phrases

### Nouns

Maybrat nouns referring to male humans have a masculine gender. This is not expressed on the noun, but shows up in the choice of a personal prefix on words agreeing with this noun. The masculine prefix *y-* contrasts with *m-*, which is used for female humans, inanimate nouns and in the plural (regardless of gender).<sup>[50]</sup> This makes the feminine the unmarked form, which is in common with most of the Papuan languages that make a gender distinction in their grammar and it is in contrast to such languages in the rest of the world.<sup>[51]</sup> Nouns do not take number marking.<sup>[52]</sup>

Nouns can be derived from verbs using the prefix *po-* (which can be a standalone word meaning "thing"): *-iit* 'eat' -> *poiit* 'food', *hren* 'sit' -> *pohren* 'chair', *-kah* 'burn' -> *pokah* 'garden', *kom* 'write' -> *pokom* 'pen'. If forming an agent noun, the verb will then also take the person prefix *m-* ʒu (provided its phonological form allows it): *afit* 'bite' -> *pomafit* 'mosquito' (lit. 'thing that bites'), *haf* 'pregnant' -> *pomhaf* 'pumpkin' (lit. 'thing that is pregnant').<sup>[53]</sup>

Compound nouns can be formed of either noun + noun, or noun + verb. In both cases, the second element modifies the first one, for example *fane rapuoh*, a compound of *fane* 'pig' and *rapuoh* 'forest', means *wild pig*, which is a kind of pig. A compound noun is phonologically a single word, but each of the two elements retains its stress (unless this would result in two consecutive stressed syllables, in which case the stress of the first element is moved to the left), with the stress on the second element becoming the main stress of the compound.<sup>[54]</sup>

### Possession

In common with most languages of the peninsula,<sup>[55]</sup> Maybrat expresses possession differently depending on whether it is alienable or inalienable. Compare the two constructions:<sup>[56]</sup>

<i>Yan</i>	<i>y-asoh</i>	(inalienable)
Yan	ʒu-mouth	
'Yan's mouth' (Dol 2007, p. 85)		
<i>fane</i>	<i>ro-Yan</i>	(alienable)
pig	POSS-Yan	
'Yan's pig' (Dol 2007, p. 89)		

Inalienably possessed nouns are the nouns for body parts (like "head", "root" etc), kinship terms ("father", "wife" etc.), and spatial nouns (*m-aom* 'outside', *m-asuf* 'middle', etc.). Such nouns obligatorily take a pronominal prefix, which agrees in person with the possessor; if the possessor is explicitly stated, then it precedes the possessed noun. For alienable nouns, on the other hand, the possessor follows the possessed noun, which does not feature a pronominal prefix but instead takes the possessive marker *ro*.<sup>[57]</sup> An inalienably possessed construction can itself be embedded in another possessed construction:

<i>tfo</i>	<i>ro-Yan</i>	<i>y-atia</i>
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machete	<u>POSS</u> -Yan	<u>3M</u> -father
'Yan's father's knife' (Dol 2007, p. 136)		

## Noun phrases

The order of constituents in a noun phrase generally follows the pattern:

head noun + adjectival verb + numeral or quantifying verb + demonstrative

The so-called 'adjectival verbs' (see below) are verbs that serve the function of what in English would have been an adjective. They take a person prefix that agrees with the head noun.<sup>[58]</sup>

<i>tfo</i> machete (head noun)	<i>m-kek</i> <u>3U</u> -red (adjectival	<i>m-aku</i> <u>3U</u> -small verbs)
<i>s-au</i> one- <u>3U</u> (numeral)		

'one small red machete' (The choice of the 3U affix is determined by the person and gender of the head noun *tfo*.) (Dol 2007, p. 128)

A numeral can be preceded by a classifier, whose use is optional and does not affect the meaning of the noun phrase. Classifiers agree in person with the head noun.

<i>awiah</i> taro	<i>m-ake</i> <u>3U</u> -fruit	<i>eok</i> two
'two taros' (Dol 2007, p. 130)		

There are four classifiers: *-ana* 'head' (a general classifier that is most commonly used for humans and animates), *-akan* 'seed/stone' (for seeds and fruit), *m-ake* 'fruit' (for fruit), and *-ata* 'leaf' (for money/banknotes). A similar use is made of the noun *yu* 'bag' when giving the quantity of uncountables:

<i>pasa</i> rice	<i>yU</i> <u>bag</u>	<i>eok</i> two
'two bags of rice' (Dol 2007, p. 131)		

Quantifying verbs include verbs like *waro* 'little' and *-siar* 'many'. There are several verbs that correspond to the English "everyone/everything", these include: *-kak* 'absolutely everything/everyone', *pria(n)* 'everyone/everything', *-tut* 'everyone/everything' (for small groups), and *wisau* 'everyone/everything' (for large groups).<sup>[59]</sup>

Last in the noun phrase comes the demonstrative:

<i>rae</i> person (head noun)	<i>m-anes</i> <u>3U</u> -old (adjectival verb)	<i>wisau</i> all (quantifying verb)
<i>re-t-o</i> specific.location.near- <u>U</u> (demonstrative)		
'all these old people' (Dol 2007, p. 133)		

## Verbs

Verbs in Maybrat obligatorily take person prefixes agreeing with the subject (see above for more details).

Verbs can be either intransitive (taking a single argument, a subject) or transitive (taking two arguments: a subject and an object). A subclass of intransitive verbs carry out functions for which languages like English use adjectives. Such 'adjectival' verbs can function both as predicates ("The book *is red*") and as attributes ("the *red* book").<sup>[60]</sup>

<i>fane</i>	<i>reto</i>	<i>m-api</i>
pig	this	<u>3u</u> -big
(predicative)		

'This pig is big.' (Dol 2007, p. 71)

<i>tuo</i>	<i>fnak</i>	<i>fane</i>
<u>1s</u>	stab	pig
<i>m-api</i>	<i>reto</i>	(attributive)
<u>3u</u> -big	this	

'I stab this big pig.' (Dol 2007, p. 71)

## Clauses

A clause consists of a predicate (typically a verb) and its arguments (typically expressed by noun phrases), with optional adverbial modifiers. In Maybrat, the order of the constituents in a clause is rigid; this is common in the languages of the Bird's Head, whether Papuan or Austronesian, but unusual for the Papuan languages broader afield.<sup>[61]</sup>

Clauses show a single intonation contour, which involves a rise in pitch on the stressed syllable of the last vowel in the clause, and a subsequent sharp drop.<sup>[62]</sup>

Because verbs take obligatory person prefixes, there is no need for a subject to be explicitly given if it is readily identifiable from the context. Thus, sentences consisting solely of a verb (with a person prefix) are acceptable:

<i>t-api</i>
<u>1s</u> -big
'I am big.' (Dol 2007, p. 144)

If expressed, the subject precedes the verb, while an object follows the verb. Thus, Maybrat has a rigid SVO word order.

<i>rae</i>	<i>m-fat</i>	<i>ara</i>
person	<u>3u</u> -fell	tree
(subject)	(verb)	(object)
'The people fell a tree.' (Dol 2007, p. 144)		

The object can also be omitted if it can easily be inferred from the context:

<i>m-kai</i>
<u>3u</u> -find

'She finds (something).'

 (Dol 2007, p. 146)

An object can be given more prominence as a topic by moving it to the start of the clause. The object then has an intonation contour of its own and it is separated from the rest of the clause by a pause:

<i>aya</i>	<i>fó</i>	/
water	this	/
<i>t-ata</i>	<i>fe</i>	
<u>1s</u> -drink	<u>NEG</u>	

'This water, I won't drink it.' (Dol 2007, p. 149)

Adverbials for time are placed before the verb, and if there is a subject they can either precede or follow it:

<i>is</i>	<i>mti</i>	<i>y-tien</i>
yesterday	night	<u>3M</u> -sleep
<i>fe</i>		
<u>NEG</u>		

'Last night he did not sleep.' (Dol 2007, p. 151)

All other types of adverbials (for manner, location, etc.) follow the verb:

<i>ait</i>	<i>y-no</i>	<i>rere</i>
<u>3M</u>	<u>3M</u> -do	carefully
<i>u</i>		
again		

'He carefully does it again.' (Dol 2007, p. 163)

<i>ait</i>	<i>y-amo</i>	<i>to-tis</i>
<u>3M</u>	<u>3M</u> -go	<u>LOC</u> -behind
<i>amah</i>	<i>iye</i>	
house	too.	

'He goes behind the house too.' (Dol 2007, p. 166)

In common with other languages of the region,<sup>[63]</sup> Maybrat expresses negation by a clause-final particle. This particle is *fe*, whose typical use is given in the first example below. But *fe* can also function as a verb and take a person prefix, as in the second example. These two uses of *fe* can have different meanings, but the distinction between the two is not consistently maintained.

<i>ait</i>	<i>y-amo</i>	<i>Kumurkek</i>
<u>3M</u>	<u>3M</u> -go	Kumurkek
<i>fe</i>		
<u>NEG</u>		

'He does not go to Kumurkek.' (Dol 2007, p. 167)

<i>arko</i>	<i>m-fe,</i>	<i>y-o</i>
firewood	<u>3U</u> -NEG	<u>3M</u> -take
<i>ita</i>	<i>m-ata</i>	
leaf	leaf	

'There is no firewood, he takes leafes.' (Dol 2007, p. 168)

Questions have the same intonation pattern as other sentence types; this is in contrast to many other languages, like English, where questions typically have a high or rising pitch. Yes/No questions are formed by the addition of *a* at the end of the clause:<sup>[64]</sup>

<i>Petrus</i>	<i>y-ama</i>	<i>oh</i>
Petrus	3 <sub>M</sub> -come	already
<i>a</i>		
INT		

'Has Petrus already come?' (Dol 2007, p. 178)

Content questions feature a question word replacing whatever part of the clause information is being sought for:

<i>Yul</i>	<i>Yumte</i>	<i>m-pet</i>
Yul	Yumte	3 <sub>U</sub> -marry
<i>awiya</i>		
who		

'Who did Yul Yumte marry?' (Dol 2007, p. 180)

## Verb sequences

A notable feature of Maybrat is the extensive use that it makes of sequences of verbs without any overt marking of their relation. Such verb sequences are typified in a number of different constructions, which might be superficially similar, but show upon closer inspection to be syntactically distinct. For example, there might be differences in the readiness with which the verbs can take distinct intonation contours or allow to be separated by pauses, the availability of their objects for extraction into relative clauses, or the possibility for an interrogative particle to take scope over only one of the two verbs.<sup>[65]</sup> The various types of verb sequences described in the rest of this section can be contrasted to coordinated constructions in which each verb forms a separate clause:

<i>m-wian</i>	<i>aya</i>	<i>m-ko</i>
3 <sub>U</sub> -scoop	water	3 <sub>S</sub> -burn
<i>tafoh</i>	<i>saruk</i>	<i>poiit</i>
fire	cook	food

'She scoops water, burns a fire and cooks food.' (Dol 2007, p. 190)

## Complement clauses

A group of constructions feature a complement clause: the second verb (and its clause) functions as the object of the first verb. The first verb can be a perception verb, a mental activity verb or a verb of saying:

<i>t-he</i>	<i>fnia</i>	<i>m-ama</i>
1 <sub>S</sub> -see	woman	3 <sub>U</sub> -come

'A see a woman coming.' (Dol 2007, p. 196)

<i>t-har</i>	<i>t-kom</i>	<i>am</i>
1 <sub>S</sub> -know	1 <sub>S</sub> -write	letter

'I can write a letter.' (= 'I know how to write a letter.') (Dol 2007, p. 197)

<i>t-sam</i>	<i>t-aut</i>	<i>ara</i>
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<u>1s</u> -afraid	<u>1s</u> -climb	tree
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'I'm afraid to climb the tree'. (Dol 1996, p. 30) However, if a pause is inserted after *t-sam* 'I'm afraid', then the sentence will be interpreted as consisting in two clauses and its meaning will be 'I'm afraid and (so) I climb the tree.'

<i>y-awe</i>	<i>n-ame</i>	<i>fane</i>
<u>3M</u> -say	<u>2</u> -stab	pig

'He says that you stabbed a pig.' (Dol 2007, p. 198) If a pause is inserted after *y-awe* 'he says', then the second clause will be interpreted as direct speech: 'He says: "You stab a pig."'

<i>Pak</i>	<i>guru</i>	<i>y-awe</i>
mister	teacher	<u>3M</u> -say
<i>y-o</i>	<i>pron</i>	
<u>3M</u> -take	bamboo	

'The teacher wants to take the bamboo'. (Dol 2007, p. 203) This is the same indirect speech construction as above. The verb *-awe* 'say' has a wide range of meanings that can be rendered in English with verbs like "want", "think", "believe" or "intend". This is common in Papuan languages. <sup>[h]</sup>

## Prepositional verbs

A construction that bears certain resemblance to the serial verb constructions known in other languages<sup>[66]</sup> involves the four so-called prepositional verbs. These are *-ae* 'at', *-kit* 'towards', *-pat* 'from', and *-kah* 'with/to/for':

<i>t-ama</i>	<i>t-pat</i>	<i>Sorong</i>
<u>1s</u> -come	<u>1s</u> -from	Sorong

'I came from Sorong.' (Dol 2007, p. 205)

<i>t-amus</i>	<i>onfuk</i>	<i>m-kah</i>
<u>1s</u> -wash	clothes	<u>3u</u> -with
<i>sabun</i>		
soap		

'I wash the clothes with soap.' (Dol 2007, p. 207) The prepositional verb *-kah* takes only the 3rd person unmarked prefix *m-* irrespective of the person of the subject.<sup>[67]</sup>

There is a cline between typical verbs on the one hand, and typical prepositions on the other. The four "prepositional verbs" of Maybrat each fall on different points along this cline and possess different combinations of verbal or prepositional characteristics. One typically verbal characteristic is the ability to serve as the main verb of a clause: *-ae* 'at' alone among these four can function as the main verb of a clause. Another verbal characteristic is the ability to show agreement with the subject of the clause. In this respect, the two verbs *-kit* 'towards' and *-pat* 'from' are more verbal in that they always take person prefixes agreeing with the subject; this contrasts both with *-kah* 'with/to/for', which always takes only the unmarked third person prefix *m-* regardless of the subject, and with *-ae*, which may follow either pattern. These four verbs also differ in the extent to which their objects can be extracted into relative clauses.<sup>[68]</sup>

## Motion verbs

Similar to serial verb constructions is also the construction with a second verb of motion (like *-amo* 'go') whose subject is the same as the object of the first verb:

<i>t-ai</i> 1 <sub>s</sub> -throw	<i>bola</i> ball	<i>m-amo</i> 3 <sub>u</sub> -go
'I throw the ball away.' (Dol 2007, p. 217)		
<i>t-arū</i> 1 <sub>s</sub> -pull	<i>awiah</i> taro	<i>m-ama</i> 3 <sub>u</sub> -come
'I pull the taro towards me.' (Dol 1996, p. 25)		

A similar construction involving the verbs *-o* 'take' and *-e* 'give' is available to express the meaning of 'giving something to someone'; such a construction is necessary because verbs in Maybrat can only take two arguments (a subject and an object) and so *-e* 'give' on its own cannot take arguments for both the object given and the person who received it:

<i>n-o</i>	<i>tapak</i>	<i>n-e</i>
2-take	tobacco	2-give
<i>ait</i>		
3M		
'Take the tobacco and give it to him.', 'Give him the tobacco.' (Dol 2007, p. 218)		

## Complex sentences

Apart from the more or less tightly integrated verb sequences from the previous section, there also exist a number of ways of combining full clauses into complex sentences. For example, a number of conjunctions can be used for joining clauses referring to events in a sequence: *mati*, *na*, *mnan*, or *o*:

<i>na</i> and then	<i>m-kuk</i> 3 <sub>u</sub> -pull	<i>intape</i> rope
<i>o</i> <u>ENUM</u>	<i>m-kuk</i> 3 <sub>u</sub> -pull	<i>ara</i> tree
<i>o</i> <u>ENUM</u>		

'Then she pulled a rope and she pulled at a tree.' (Dol 2007, p. 230)

Disjunction ('either, or') can be expressed with the negator *fe*. Subordinate clauses for purpose or cause are introduced with *re* 'in order to', *mi* 'so that', or *ke* 'because':

<i>t-amo</i> 1 <sub>s</sub> -go	<i>amah</i> house	<i>kiyam</i> ill
<i>re</i> <u>in order to</u>	<i>suster</i> nurse	<i>m-he</i> 3 <sub>u</sub> -see
<i>t-ao</i> 1 <sub>s</sub> -foot		

'I'm going to the hospital in order for the nurse to look at my foot.' (Dol 2007, p. 231)

A relative clause is introduced by the relativiser *ro*: this is the same particle as the one used in possessive constructions (see above), and it may be related to the demonstrative *re*-.<sup>[69]</sup>

<i>Simon</i>	<i>ro</i>	<i>y-men</i>
Simon	REL	3M-marry
<i>Maria</i>	<i>kiyam</i>	
Maria	ill	

'Simon who married Maria is ill. (Dol 2007, p. 137)

Similar constructions are available for several kinds of subordinate adverbial clauses. Temporal adverbial clauses are introduced by *um ro* (lit. 'the moment when') or *kine wo* (lit. 'the time when') – the difference between these two relativisers parallels the difference between the related demonstrative prefixes *re-* (specific, can be pinpointed) and *we-* (non-specific).<sup>[70]</sup>

<i>kine</i>	<i>wo</i>	<i>t-amo</i>
time	REL	1S-go
<i>Sorong</i>	<i>tim</i>	<i>am</i>
Sorong	send	letter

'When I go down to Sorong, I will send a letter' (Dol 2007, p. 235) The moment of going to Sorong is non-specific, the implication of the use of *kine wo* is that there is no concrete plan yet.

Adverbial clauses for manner are introduced with *fi-re*, where *fi-* is the demonstrative prefix meaning "similar to". The marker for locative adverbial clauses can be one of *wo*, *wo-yo* or *wo-re*, without an apparent difference in meaning.<sup>[71]</sup> An example of a locative clause:

<i>ana</i>	<i>m-suoh</i>	<i>wore</i>
3P	3U-clean	REL
<i>fra</i>	<i>m-hu</i>	
stone	3U-stay	

'The clean where the stone is. (Dol 2007, p. 237)

A style figure common in narratives is tail-head linkage, where the last predicate of one sentence is repeated at the start of the next one:

<i>frok</i>	<i>m-hu</i>	<i>sai</i>
emerge	3U-stay	just
<u><i>amah</i></u>	<u><i>m-api</i></u>	/
house	3U-big	/
<i>m-hu</i>	<u><i>amah</i></u>	<u><i>m-api</i></u>
3U-stay	house	3U-big
<i>m-hu</i>	<i>m-hu</i>	<i>m-hu</i>
3U-stay	3U-stay	3U-stay
<i>ku</i>	<i>re-f-i</i>	<u><i>hropit</i></u>
child	there	umbilical.cord
<u><i>ktus</i></u>	/	<u><i>hropit</i></u>
break	/	umbilical.cord
<u><i>ktus</i></u>	<i>na</i>	<i>m-hu</i>
break	and.then	3U-stay
<i>u</i>	<i>m-hu</i>	<i>m-hu</i>
again	3U-stay	3U-stay
<i>ku</i>	<i>re-f-i</i>	<u><i>y-anes</i></u>
child	there	3M-old



/	<i>y-anes</i>	<i>y-apum</i>
/	3M-old	3M-crawl
o	<i>y-ros</i>	o
ENUM	3M-stand	ENUM
<i>y-amo</i>	<i>pua-puo</i>	o
3M-go	toddle-REDUP	ENUM
<i>y-amo</i>	<i>trit</i>	o
3M-go	fluent	ENUM
<i>tipuo</i>	<i>y-anes</i>	
immediately	3M-old	

'She arrives and just lives at the big house. She lives at the big house and she lives there for a long time and the child's umbilical cord comes off and se still lives there and she lives there for a long time and the child gets older. He gets older and he crawls, he stands, he toddles, he walks well, and then he is grown up.' (Dol 2007, p. 242)

## Notes

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- For various dialect classifications and for an exhaustive list of villages, see Hays (2003).
- The schwas are not phonemic and hence not represented in writing. Brown (1991, p. 25) reports that in an earlier proposed practical orthography the schwa was represented using the letter *e*, mirroring the practice in the Indonesian language familiar to Maybrat speakers, but that was found to be confusing to users.
- The spelling has been adapted to Dol's system; *ty* is pronounced as an affricate and written *j* in Brown's proposed orthography.
- This is according to the analysis in Dol (2007, pp. 55). A different treatment, based on the Maymaru dialect, is presented in Brown (1990), where the vowel *a* is analysed as part of the prefix for all but the first and second person plurals.
- There is another small set of verbs that do not take person prefixes when they appear as second verbs in a certain rarely used construction. (Dol 2007, pp. 192–95)
- Fo* can also function as an adverb, with the meaning of *-f-* 'near' extended to 'very near in time': at the end of a clause, *fo* adds the meaning of an inceptive aspect 'beginning to'. (Dol 1998, pp. 550–51)
- Elmberg (1955, p. 25), who worked in the Ayamaru area, noted that counting starts on the little finger of the left hand.
- However, there do exist separate verbs meaning for example "think" (*-not*), or "hope" (*-winaut*). (Dol 2007, p. 77)

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- Dol 2007, p. 1.
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- Gratton 1991.
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7. Brown (1990), p. 43.
8. Holton & Klammer 2017, p. 571.
9. Dol 2007, p. 47.
10. Dol 2007, p. 7.
11. Dol 2007, pp. 6, 301.
12. Elmberg 1955, p. 8. See Dol (2007, p. 6) for a different interpretation.
13. See Reesink (2005) and Holton & Klammer (2017, p. 582), among others.
14. Dol 2007, pp. 8–9. This seems to be largely consistent with the classification in Brown (1990, p. 43), where the four dialect areas (not counting Karon) generally correspond to each of the four subdistricts of Ayamaru, Aitinyo, Aifat and Mare.
15. Dol 2007, pp. 9–10.
16. Dol 2007, pp. 15–17.
17. Dol 2007, pp. 17–18.
18. Dol 2007, p. 19.
19. Dol 2007, p. 18.
20. Brown 1991, pp. 22–23.
21. Dol 2007, pp. 21–24.
22. Dol 2007, p. 10.
23. Brown 1991, pp. 16–17.
24. Dol 2007, pp. 27–28. It is possible that the discrepancy could to a certain degree be due to the different behaviour of stress in the two varieties.
25. Dol 2007, pp. 30–38. A different formal analysis is presented in Brown (1990).
26. Dol (2007, p. 37) gives examples of [ɪ] before /i/, [ɔ] before /w/ and [ɣ] before /wi/. Brown (1990, p. 7) lists the variants [ɪ] and [ɛ].
27. Dol 2007, p. 33.
28. Dol 2007, pp. 38–39.
29. Brown 1991, p. 2.
30. Dol 2007, p. 27, f. 20; p. 54, fn. 3.
31. Donohue 2011.
32. Dol 2007, p. 38.
33. Dol 2007, p. 41.
34. Dol 2007, p. 62.
35. Brown 1990, p. 45–46.
36. Dol 2007, pp. 62–3, 68, 85.
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49. Dol 2007, pp. 108–10.
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55. Holton & Klamer 2017, p. 600.
56. Dol 2007, pp. 83–89.
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59. Dol 2007, pp. 72–73.
60. Dol 2007, pp. 70–72.
61. Holton & Klamer 2017, p. 588.
62. Dol 2007, p. 44.
63. Holton & Klamer 2017, p. 608.
64. Dol 2007, p. 177.
65. Dol 2007, p. 221 "The most striking feature of the Maybrat language is that it makes extensive use of strings of juxtaposed verbs without overt coordinators between them."
66. Dol 2007, p. 221. This might be too conservative. Other sources have less difficulty identifying these, and other constructions, as involving serial verbs, see for example Holton & Klamer (2017, pp. 612–13).
67. Dol 2007, p. 80.
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## Further reading

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- Dol, Philomena (2000). "Maybrat" (<http://sealang.net/archives/nusa/pdf/nusa-v47-p45-58.pdf>) (PDF). *NUSA - Linguistic Studies of Indonesian and Other Languages in Indonesia*. **47**. Contains a Maybrat story along with interlinear glosses and a translation.

## External links

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- An open access collection of Mai Brat language (CVL1) (<http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/CLV1>) at Paradisec (requires registration)
  - A wordlist at the Austronesian Basic Vocabulary Database (<https://abvd.shh.mpg.de/austronesian/language.php?id=852>) (the more fragmentary list at TransNewGuinea.org (<http://transnewguinea.org/family/maybrat>) includes items from the Karon Dori dialect)
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